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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Housekeepers' Chat Thursday, March 12, 1929.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Campaigning Against Flies and Bedbugs. " Information from Bureau of Entomology, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available: "The Bedbug," "The Housefly and How to Suppress It."

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My Next-Door Neighbor is putting up screens this morning. When I passed her house, she was perched on a step-ladder, fitting a new screen into the kitchen window.

"Aren't you a little ahead of the season?" I inquired. "It's not too early to talk about flies, but it's a trifle chilly to be putting up screens today. How about it?"

"Aunt Sammy," said my Neighbor, "it's not too early to begin an active campaign against flies. Eternal vigilance is the price we pay for freedom from these obnoxious pests, and I intend to have every screen on this house by the end of the week. I began with the kitchen because this morning-- perish the thought-- I found a fly buzzing 'round my pet geranium. If you want a few appropriate remarks, with which to preface your radio talk, just imagine what I said when I found the first fly of spring. Snappy, short, and to the point--were my remarks."

"Did you catch the fly?" I asked.

"Indeed I did. It was a merry chase, withal. The fly flew east, the fly flew west, but I finally caught the ugly pest. There -- how's that for a rhyme?"

"Not so bad," I said. "Be careful, when you step off the ladder. It doesn't look very steady to me."

From the Bureau of Entomology I have obtained some information for you, about getting rid of household pests, namely, houseflies and bedbugs.

First, as to flies and the like:

Many of these troublesome household insects feed on crumbs, scraps, and other exposed food. The only way to beat them is to keep food supplies in tight metal or glass containers, and clean up promptly any food crumbs that may be scattered about. Never leave food uncovered. Keep the garbage pail closed, and have it emptied regularly. Rinse it out, and line it with clean paper, every time it is emptied.

The common housefly is probably the most hated of all the summer pests. The presence of flies is an indication of uncleanliness, insanitary conditions, and improper disposal of substances in which they breed. Flies are not only annoying, they are actually dangerous to health, because they carry disease germs to exposed foods.

The common housefly is essentially a breeder in filth. It breeds in, and feeds upon, all sorts of animal and vegetable waste. When it crawls over infected material, it readily becomes loaded with germs, which it may transfer to food. For instance, when the housefly comes in contact with material containing typhoid germs, it picks them up on its hairy feet, and may carry them to the food in our kitchens. If the food is not cooked afterwards, it may produce typhoid. In this same way, other intestinal germ diseases, such as Asiatic cholera, dysentery, and infantile diarrhea, are carried. There is also strong circumstantial evidence that other dread diseases are carried by flies.

When we realize that flies frequent and feed upon the most filthy substances, we can readily see the necessity and importance of controlling them.

The most logical method of getting rid of flies is the elimination or treatment of all breeding places, such as stable manure. Housewives may do much toward improving insanitary conditions by encouraging the installation and effective operation of adequate sanitary systems in cities, towns and even rural communities. In addition to the elimination of breeding places of flies , it is often necessary to use fly papers, and poisons, flytraps, and insect screens.

Insect screens for doors and windows should be well made, and must fit tightly, otherwise they will not keep insects out. It is equally important that they be made of good and durable screen cloth. Insect screen cloth made of copper, although a little higher in price, will prove more economical in damp climates, as it lasts many years. Screen cloth made of steel, either painted or metal coated, is often used. Painted steel screen cloth will last from one to several years without repainting, depending upon the dampness of the climate.

If you are buying new screens this year, ask for the screen which is made with 16 meshes to the square inch. This keeps out most mosquitoes and other small insects, as well as flies.

There is one other pest that strikes terror to the heart of the woman who is proud of her housekeeping, and that is the bedbug. A chance bedbug is no disgrace, but a family of them is an indication of relaxed vigilance on the part of the housekeeper. Even though you are sure there is not a bedbug in the house, look over all the beds frequently in the summer time, because stray bedbugs are often brought in on clothing or on laundry. Unfortunately, also, the bedbug is quite capable of migrating from one house to another, and will often continue to come from an adjoining house, sometimes for a period of several months. Such a migration is especially likely to take place if no one is living in the infested house.

There are a good many questions I cannot answer, among them being, "Why is a bedbug?" But I do know that bedbugs have been in existence as far back as the records run. They were undoubtedly of common occurrence in the dwellings of the ancient peoples of Asia. The Romans were well acquainted with the bedbug. They gave it the name of Ci-mex. One of the old Roman naturalists, Pliny (Plin-ny), believed that the bedbug had medicinal properties, and it was recommended as a specific for serpent bites.

No one seems to know, for sure, when the bedbug first appeared in England. However, about 1750 it was reported to be very abundant in the seaport towns, but was scarcely known inland. The bedbug has accompanied man, wherever he has gone. Ships are very apt to be infested with it, and have been the chief means of its wide distribution. It probably came to this country with the earliest colonists; at least one writer, in 1748, stated that the bedbug was plentiful in the English colonies and in Canada, though unknown among the Indians.

One of the old English names of the bedbug was "wall-louse." It was afterwards very well known as the "chinch." This name is still used in parts of this country. I could not find the origin of the name "bedbug", although it is such a descriptive one that it would seem to have been very naturally suggested. There are local names for these ugly parasites in almost every section of the country. For instance, around Boston they are called "chintzes" and "chinches," in Baltimore they are known as "mahogany flats," New Yorkers style them "redcoats," and in the west they are called "crimson ramblers."

But whether they're called crimson ramblers or bedbugs, the main point is how to get rid of them. As I said before, even though you are positive there is not a bedbug in the house, it is wise to look over all the beds frequently, in the summer time, because these embarrassing pests can arrive quite unannounced, in a laundry basket, in a trunk, or in a suitcase. If you discover any bugs, force kerosene, gasoline, or benzine into the cracks and crevices of the bedstead, and along the mouldings and baseboards of the room. Do this every three or four days, for 10 days or two weeks, to kill any bugs hatched in the meantime.

There are various bedbug remedies and mixtures for sale, and these are frequently of value. The great desideratum, however, is a daily inspection of beds and bedding, particularly the seams and tufting of mattresses, and of all crevices and locations about the premises where the bugs may be hiding. A vigorous campaign should, in the course of a week or so, result in the extermination of the obnoxious bug. Before I conclude my discourse on the bedbug, I want to mention the bulletin published by the United States Department of Agriculture, which describes several methods of doing away with this persistent pest. It is Farmers' Bulletin 7-5-4-F. There is also a bulletin on house flies, and how to suppress them - Farmers' Bulletin 1-4-0-8-F. And there is one on traps for flies of different kinds, Farmers' Bulletin 7-3-4-F. These bulletins are free.

Tomorrow: "Cotton Frocks for Spring."